

Meeting workforce needs?: developing and delivering education for ‘Sustainable Communities’

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Abstract: Embedding notions of sustainability within both higher education and practice occasionally faces resistance. This chapter details one such experience of resistance by drawing on attempts in the last decade to develop and embed the concept of ‘sustainable communities’ in higher education and professional practice within the United Kingdom (UK). The Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities (FdSc) was developed by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) in partnership with a select number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The development of the FdSc was spurred by, what was perceived as, the significant lack of skills, within the various sectors, required to deliver New Labour’s ‘Sustainable Communities’ agenda within a framework of regeneration. By drawing upon research with the HCA, HEIs and students this chapter explores the development of the FdSc and reflects upon the experience of the various stakeholders who have played a part in the delivery of the programme. A positive unanticipated outcome of this process; the collaborative working, provides ideas as to how to increase the effectiveness of collaboration across HEIs generally. The chapter also highlights various challenges and dilemmas’ facing the FdSc as it was delivered within a very different political and public milieu to that of the 2000s. The chapter focuses on the difficulties that can be faced by HEIs when they become the delivery agents of political discourse.

Introduction

The concept of Sustainable Development and its rise to prominence within policy making can be tracked back to the 1987 ‘Our Common Future’ report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) and subsequently the prominent 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit (Bell and Morse, 2008, p.3), which endorsed Local Agenda 21 (Dryzek, 1997) which set out plans for action from national governments, and was followed by increased pressure on governments to formulate comprehensive policies for sustainable development (Burke, 1995). The term itself has proved to be almost ‘chameleon-like’ (Raco 2005, p. 329), finding itself reinterpreted by a range of interest groups to ‘justify a range of often conflicting and divergent agendas’ (Raco 2005, p. 329). Not all attempts at embedding notions of

sustainability in policy, professional practice and education though have been successful. Some attempts at doing so have experienced resistance (see Corcoran and Wals, 2004) this chapter details one way in which this resistance has occurred.

Notions of sustainability have to varying extents informed UK policy development in the areas of transport, energy, biodiversity and overseas development to name a few. One particular area of interest here is urban regeneration, as developed by the New Labour Government, which became closely linked to notions of sustainability (Tallon, 2010, p.163) and, within this, the idea that professionals and communities should work together to create “sustainable communities”. The language and terminology used in related reports reveal the influence of two closely related ideas: sustainable development and “new urbanism” (ODPM, 2003; 2005). The various definitions of sustainable development are all linked by the “notion of ‘Equity’” the view that resources are to be “used fairly to meet the needs of both current and future generations” (Jones and Evans, 2008, p 83).

The rhetoric of “new urbanism” can also be found in Labour’s sustainable communities documentation. Cochrane (2007) suggests that the new urbanism movement’s influence on the concept of sustainable communities is manifested in the support for the idea that “better ‘communities’ can be developed by professionals rather than focusing on the “social processes of segregation and exclusion” (p. 54). Raco agrees with this criticism but attributes it to the related neoliberal principles underpinning sustainable communities (Raco, 2005, p. 331). Thus the seemingly uncontentious ambition of working towards a “sustainable community” has been vulnerable to criticism by academics concerned about its underpinning philosophies. Raco (2005, p. 342) associates New Labour’s version of ‘sustainable communities’ with a “light green” manifestation of [Sustainable Development]’ in that it does not question fundamental environmental and social issues associated with development. Indeed, there are concurrent conceptualisations of ‘sustainable communities’ that can be seen to provide a deeper shade of green that resonates more strongly with the issues raised in Rio, such as Agyeman’s (2005) focus on environmental and social justice and Barton’s (2000) reinventing of the neighbourhood as a site of more ecological living.

These voices of concern were arguably relatively marginalised by the dominant “mantra” that the main challenges enshrined in the Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM, 2005) - the lack of “key worker” housing in the South East and the decline of communities in the North and Midlands - could be resolved through, amongst other things, the activities of professionals. With such a key role, the skills of these professionals involved in developing and managing “sustainable communities” attracted specific government attention (Rogerson, Sadler, Wong and Green, 2010, p.505) and led to the Egan Review (2004). This Review is the main starting point in understanding the perceived need for and development of a specific course which became the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities (FdSc).

The Egan Review

In his review John Egan focused on analysing the specific skills that were necessary in order to deliver ‘sustainable communities’. He defined sustainable communities as places that:

“...meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity”.(Egan, 2004, p7)

This statement was supported by a more detailed explanation of the key characteristics of sustainable communities that were collated in a diagram that became known as the “Egan

Wheel”. However, whilst some professionals such as the Chartered Institute for Housing and Royal Town Planning Institute broadly welcomed the review (Chartered Institute for Housing and Royal Town Planning Institute, 2003, p.10) Rogerson et al. (2010, p.505) argue that it was a “poorly defined” concept.

The Egan Review concluded that a range of technical skills as well as more generic skills, were needed to ensure the best chance of success in implementing housing and regeneration projects. The targeted ‘core occupations’ included those working as town planners, architects, urban designers, developers as well as staff from local, regional and central government and workers within voluntary and community organisations. The Review asserted the desirability of encouraging people to enter such core occupations and ‘upskill’ in order to ensure the creation and maintenance of sustainable communities. Following the Review the Labour Government of the time supported the creation of what was to become the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) the role of which, after further permutations, was, for the later stages of the 2000s, embedded within a new quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

The remainder of this chapter discusses the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities (FdSc) developed by the ASC/HCA in partnership with a select number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It describes the rollout of the FdSc. and summarises the findings of an evaluation of the new qualification and the associated partnership working in HEIs. The issues that arise when HEIs become delivery agents of an activity centred around a particular political discourse are considered. This chapter also presents some of the unanticipated positive consequences of development and delivery of the FdSc experienced by HEIs. These consequences have implications for those involved or contemplating collaborative working in higher education in general.

The Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities

Following the Egan Review a report by the Homes and Communities Academy ‘Mind the Skills Gap: The skills we need for sustainable communities’ (Academy for Sustainable Communities, 2007), forecast a shortfall in the supply of suitably qualified professionals that could work in, what was perceived as, a growing sector. In taking steps to address the identified skills gaps it was decided, following a gap analysis and market testing, that a new work-based qualification should be established: the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities (FdSc).

A report was commissioned to support the HCA in designing and developing the FdSc. The report that followed the development of the FdSc, observed that there was ‘a clear and growing need for an entry level qualification in Sustainable Communities’ (Sheffield Hallam University, 2007). This research highlighted growing skills gaps and difficulties with recruitment across the sector. The report recommended that the FdSc should:

- allow and encourage progression to further qualifications to allow specialisation;
- extend and enhance generic skills in a professional context;
- introduce technical skills (with a view to further specialisation at higher levels) with an emphasis on cross-disciplinary working;
- adapt to evolving issues e.g. climate change; quality of life (including health); green issues; and,
- provide for flexible learning approaches.

In addition, the research highlighted a number of issues worthy of further consideration such as:

- concern over the terminology of `sustainable communities` which was thought to be possibly ambiguous, confusing and fragmented. More definition was recommended;
- the funding available for students and employers was seen as limited. A sliding scale and bursaries were suggested as strategies to overcome barriers posed by finite individual or public sector capacity to fund enrolment on the programme; and,
- the need for close partnership working in order to attract non-traditional students.

The FdSc that was subsequently developed aimed to:

- engage students in a challenging, critical and interdisciplinary education in sustainable communities' policy and practice;
- stimulate the students' awareness of the links and tensions between theory, policy and practice and to support the development of their professional community management skills through activities that have strong links with practice;
- enable students to develop their academic and professional key skills and competencies in an interdisciplinary and inter-professional educational environment;
- enable students to develop the qualities of reflective, professional and empathetic sustainable communities practitioners;
- offer 'pathways' that will enable students to meet the requirements of a range of 'core' sustainable communities' professional bodies, for professional accreditation by including assessment of work and voluntary experience thus providing a route to professional membership; and
- provide students with transferable, as well as specific vocational skills, which can be used to provide a foundation to enable and empower students to make choices in work, training and education throughout their life.

Homes and Communities Agency (2008)

Sheffield Hallam University became the first HEI to launch the FdSc and the then Academy for Sustainable Communities (2008), now Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), subsequently embarked on a three year Higher Education Strategy where the new FdSc was the centrepiece. A core component of this strategy involved the rollout of the FdSc across England with the aim of identifying HEIs in each of the English regions which had the reputation, capacity and capabilities to deliver the degree. The Strategy outlined a number of characteristics that the ASC expected of the FdSc namely:

- the focus upon generic skills;
- multi-disciplinary learning;
- knowledge and understanding of sustainable communities policy and practice;
- pathways to further study; and,
- pathways to progression into sustainable communities professions e.g. housing, planning and environmental studies.

At the same time there was an expectation that the HEIs delivering the FdSc would adapt the content and add modules as is relevant to their local/regional and employer needs.

The rollout of the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities

The rollout of the FdSc was supported to a significant extent by the ASC and its successor, the HCA. This support included the provision of a modest bursary for a small number of students at each HEI to assist in meeting tuition costs for their first year of study. The

ASC/HCA also provided specialist consultancy support to aid the development of the FdSc, resources for marketing and secretariat support to assist in the formation and maintenance of a network of HEIs involved in the delivery of the programme.

Within the Higher Education Strategy it was perceived that the successful rollout of the FdSc relied, to a significant extent, on the regional distribution of HEIs providing the FdSc. However, at the height of the delivery of the FdSc in 2011 it had not achieved total coverage across regions of England. As of 2011 (at the height of the rollout) the programme was validated in the following regions:

- **North East:** Northumbria University.
- **North West:** The University of Salford.
- **Yorkshire and the Humber:** Sheffield Hallam University.
- **West Midlands:** Staffordshire University with Stafford College (delivered jointly) and Birmingham City University.
- **East Midlands:** De Montfort University; University of Northampton with University Centre Milton Keynes (delivered jointly).
- **London:** London Metropolitan University.

The regional ‘gaps’ in the distribution of providers compared to that originally envisaged were:

- East of England;
- South West; and,
- South East.

The HCAs Higher Education Strategy was designed for the 2008-2011 period therefore prior to the 2010 General Election the HCA decided to wind down its involvement in the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities with a view to encouraging the network of providers to continue to work together to market and develop the qualification. However, the withdrawal of HCA support for the programme was accelerated as part of the reduction in HCA budget that followed the 2010 General Election.

The remainder of this chapter details the findings from a research study that was commissioned by the HCA and undertaken by the authors, to analyse and reflect on the FdSc programme and delivery between the 2008-2011 period. This research study had a number of more specific objectives which included undertaking an investigation into the impact the FdSc had had; ascertaining any lessons that could be learned from this process; and developing any recommendations for taking the FdSc forward. In order to undertake the study this involved bringing together various sources as well as consultations with key stakeholders involved in the design, delivery and receipt of the FdSc over this period. A total of ten face-to-face interviews were held with staff in all HEIs delivering the FdSc as well as interviews with twelve students who were enrolled on the programme at the time. Discussions were also held with a number of the national organisations centrally involved in the development of the FdSc. These interviews were recorded and subsequently translated for thematic analysis.

Findings and discussion

Overall, there was a mixed picture with regards to the delivery of the FdSc. As of January 2011, recruitment for the FdSc across the various HEIs was at very low levels. Sheffield Hallam University, which was the first HEI to commence delivery of the FdSc in 2007-08 had not recruited for the last two years. Salford, Northumbria, London Metropolitan and the

partnership between Staffordshire and Stafford were all running the programme with relatively small student cohorts (circa 10 students). The remaining HEIs of Birmingham City, De Montfort and the partnership between Northampton and Milton Keynes had been unable to recruit sufficient numbers to commence the delivery of the programme within their respective institutions. In total, there were currently 71 students enrolled on the FdSc across the various HEIs as of 2011. Recruitment onto the FdSc had been a real barrier for all HEIs. Discussions with staff revealed that there were very few enquiries about the courses despite significant attempts by most if not all HEIs to market the programme as widely as possible. At the same time HEIs have also experienced problems with retention of students which were largely attributable to students finding themselves in an insecure position both in terms of potential staff redundancies and reductions in funding available for staff training in light of the austerity policies of the then incoming Coalition Government in the UK. This, to a large extent, is a result of the 'perfect storm' of factors involving: anxiety about HE funding, public sector funding cuts, the lack of regeneration activity and a move away a 'sustainable communities' political discourse. Those HEIs who had ran the programme the longest were either being forced to close the programme or merge with other programmes. Similarly, those staff within HEIs with the FdSc validated and ready to commence delivery were seemingly becoming under pressure to justify retaining the programme.

A number of HEIs saw the resolution to recruitment problems as either engaging more effectively with public sector employers, particularly social housing providers who were, at the time, becoming more and more involved in development initiatives, or a need to engage more widely and articulately with a broader potential student base. There was also a suggestion that in order to ensure the content of the FdSc reaches as many people as possible the FdSc might be discontinued and the content embedded within more popular subjects such as Housing, Planning, Regeneration, etc. Alternatively, other HEIs suggested that there needed to be a more concerted effort to more clearly articulate what the FdSc was and what the benefits of it were.

Impact on addressing skills shortages

The key reason for developing the FdSc was the intention to address some of the key perceived skills shortages in the housing and regeneration sectors. As the FdSc was arguably in its infancy, compared to more established programmes, it is difficult to ascertain how the programme had been meeting these needs. However, there was some evidence gathered during the consultation as to ways in which such skills gaps were being addressed.

In the Milton Keynes and Northampton partnership it was perceived that the planning and development of the FdSc had helped to create a dialogue with, and between, a wide range of public/private/community sector players within the Milton Keynes/South Midlands area. The result of this dialogue was that the differing needs and expectations of the various local stakeholders were reportedly more clearly understood. It was thought that this probably would not have happened without the HCA and the FdSc acting as catalyst. The University of Salford though talked about the challenge faced by delivering learning in sustainability skills. Here the experience was that students requested 'knowledge' about sustainable communities as opposed to the development of 'skills'. It was therefore difficult to know how the principles learned on the programme took shape 'on the ground' within the fabric of community settings. It was also thought that the concept of 'skills' was something that employee organisations struggled with too, but that some head-way had been made around issues such as 'collaborative' skills with some students.

Another HEI commented that although the FdSc tends to be designed for people who are in work in the related sectors already, a good number of their students were either unemployed or currently working outside of the sectors. Here it was thought that part of the role of the FdSc should be to develop the skills necessary to enter employment in the housing

and regeneration sectors. As a result an employability element (i.e. interview protocols, application completion) was being built into this programme to help these students secure employment in the future.

One HEI was however sceptical about the potential for the FdSc to fill the gaps in skills. It was perceived that the programme entered an already crowded market where there was existing provision that met similar objectives such as courses in Community Development, Regeneration, Planning and Housing.

The impact of the FdSc upon individuals

In terms of the views of current students on the FdSc there appeared to be an even split between the students on the programme who saw the FdSc as a route to assisting them in their career or work, with those who saw the programme as a way of increasing their knowledge of sustainability and/or sustainable communities for personal development.

Similarly, students' expectations of the FdSc were varied which might perhaps be best explained by the diversity of the sustainable communities area and the diversity offered by the FdSc programme. Some students talked about their expectations that the programme would help them in their work around community involvement, sustainability and environmental issues. Other students simply hoped the programme would provide them with more skills, knowledge and experience that would help them at some unspecified point in the future. These latter statements were particularly common amongst students who had been away from formal education for a period of time. For many students this was the preferred route to learning about sustainable communities and meeting their learning needs. A number of people had engaged in some prior reading around the general area - with one student reviewing the related material online via the HCA website - but who preferred the more traditional classroom learning environment instead.

Although students were mostly positive with regards to how the course had been delivered and 'new' methods for delivery, trying to adequately satisfy the expectations of all students was clearly impossible. Some people liked the timings of the programme in one institution whilst for others this did not suit their other commitments. Similarly, whilst some view online delivery positively others perceived this as an occasional barrier and preferred more traditional (i.e. classroom) modes of delivery.

Impact on their work

For a number of the students consulted it was too early in the course to detail specific ways in which the course had impacted on their working lives. Some people talked about specific projects they were involved in and how the content of the course had helped them:

I have applied both knowledge and practical skills learnt so far to my current job role. I have also been able to understand more in meetings with other agencies and colleagues. As previously stated because the course is up to date with the current Government's legislation and guidance it means I am able to bring this knowledge into work.

I am now facilitating communities to engage in their own planning and we use the knowledge gained through my course to help structure community plans. Including making sure that consideration is given to all factors of a Sustainable Community. I now assess projects for their environmental, economic and social impacts.

However, the single most pervasive impact mentioned by students was the confidence gained by taking part

I am more confident to work in partnership with other organisations such as police, health, schools and councillors as I have a better understanding that a holistic approach is the only way.

From the people who worked in the housing or regeneration sectors all thought they were either slightly or significantly better equipped as a result of the FdSc. Students' statements and employers suggest that they were managing to apply their learning from the Foundation Degree to their workplace/community. This needs to be tested by further research in students' workplaces/communities but if confirmed it would very positive because Hockey et al. (2010, p. 532) argues learning generic skills in a setting removed from the workplace such as higher education requires the student to overcome a "far-transfer" challenge (Haskell, 2001). Yet wherever they studied the students do not seem to have found this transfer from educational institution to workplace or community difficult.

Unanticipated outcomes from delivering the FdSc

In order to provide a rounded view of the three years activity around the FdSc, as well as exploring whether the FdSc was meeting its specific objectives in terms of skills, it was also important to explore if there had been any unanticipated outcomes as a result of going through the process of development and delivery of the FdSc.

One additional outcome had been how involvement in the FdSc had, quite directly, impacted on the content and delivery of other more traditional courses within the HEIs. This included instances of refocusing content of existing courses upon sustainability issues as well as transferring knowledge from the development of assessment framework of the FdSc to other programmes. For Milton Keynes and Northampton they had been pleasantly surprised by the wide range of private sector interest in the broad subject area of 'sustainability' and the focus they are now giving to creating working communities. They were engaging with the new Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) (independent sub-regional bodies established to drive forward local socio-economic interests) to explore potential opportunities and links.

An arguably more significant (in terms of lessons for HEIs generally) unanticipated outcome was the resoundingly positive view of the HEI staff towards the establishment of the FdSc Network. As well as this being supportive in a practical sense, in terms of providing shared learning around validation and resources, it was clear that the Network members received a great deal of intellectual support from their colleagues. It was also expressed by one HEI that the Network could potentially be a trailblazer in delivering new, and established, thinking around sustainability, community development and localism:

The FdSc network is ahead of the game and could be in the vanguard of making sure that teaching and learning around the 'localism' agenda is taken forward. Saul Alinski model of 'community organising' may well be helpful in presenting FdSc work as a development tool to "map knowledge that was not previously on the map" and to help a range of sectors to create avenues to break down barriers on how to work with communities. But to do this it needs to be more widely based than housing/planning/regeneration groups within HEI's.

The issues with the lack of recruitment to the Foundation Degree Sustainable Communities discussed earlier in the chapter have meant that the Network's main reason for existence dissolved. However, given that there was such a positive view of involvement in the Network when it had a focus on the Foundation Degree it is worth reflecting on why this may have been the case as it may have lessons for future collaboration in HEIs. Members of the Network suggested that one of the key reasons for the success was that the HEIs involved

were not directly competing with each other for students. The tension between educational institutions being expected to both compete and collaborate was identified in the mid 1990s (Bridges and Husband, 1996 cited in Connolly et al. 2007) and continues at even greater levels today with the recent increase in student fees in the UK. As Connolly et al. discuss there are various models for successful collaboration with some focusing more on process and structure issues (Connolly et al. 2007) and others such as Weiss (1987 cited in Connolly et al. 2007 p161) emphasising the importance of motivation. Yet whichever model is applied it is clear that whilst collaborating organisations need to have a shared common interest ‘too much’ competition can hinder collaborative working.

It is suggested that in HEIs generally, the likelihood of successful collaboration is likely to be increased if organisations avoid working with rival HEIs. If institutions are to be encouraged to focus on seeking collaborative working with organisations that are not direct rivals this will often mean that they will be working with more geographically disparate organisations. In such circumstances the use of digital environments can potentially help with the collaborative of process.

Conclusions

In spite of the many positives highlighted by the research the picture painted by the staff, delivering the FdSc, of the future of the course was bleak. There were a number of perceived challenges facing the FdSc: low student numbers, changing political rhetoric away from ‘sustainable communities’, reduction in public sector funding and a lack of support within higher education for Foundation Degrees. In addition, there was uncertainty around whether there would be the capacity, within training and staff development budgets of public sector employers, to fund students to undertake the FdSc. It was thought that the FdSc may be seen as a ‘risky’ option for employers who may instead prefer more established, familiar and ‘tried and tested’ subjects such as Housing, Planning, Regeneration and Surveying. The end point for the FdSc programme in the HEIs analysed here and for the more specifically was cessation; none of the institutions were able to continue to support this programme as it was originally configured over the long-term. At the end of the research most HEIs were either considering or were actively exploring how the FdSc could be merged with other more established programmes (i.e. social policy, geography, housing) in order to embed the valuable messages around sustainability.¹

This research has provided an insight as to the journey HEIs have undergone in developing a programme which was perceived as crucial to meeting the needs of a workforce required to deliver a programme closely aligned to a particular political discourse driven by the public sector. On an operational level the FdSc appears to have been successful. To a limited extent it has met many of the aims laid out by the initial earlier report which preceded its establishment:

- It allowed and encouraged progression to further qualifications to allow specialisation
- It extended and enhanced the generic skills of students undertaking the FdSc in a professional context
- It introduced technical skills with an emphasis on cross-disciplinary working
- It was able to adapt to evolving issues

¹ It should be noted that at the time of writing Glyndwr University has a Housing and Sustainable Communities Programme

- It provided for flexible learning approaches (although a number of students reportedly prefer more traditional modes of delivery).

The unique features of the FdSc in particular the involvement and support of the HCA and the creation of the FdSc Network can be considered significant successes and have led to a number of positive unanticipated outcomes.

There remains a significant barrier in place in order for the overall aim of the FdSc to be the entry level award necessary in order to meet the skills needs in the field of Sustainable Communities. This barrier is a lack of apparent synergy between those who have a strategic overview and influence of the housing, regeneration and community development sectors, who recognize the need for a workforce who have generic skills and that is literate in cross-sectoral partnership working, and the actual organizations currently working in these sectors. Although there are a number of issues arising from this study that explain the lack of synergy it appears that there are three main reasons:

Firstly, putting to one side the increase in student fees at Universities in the UK, the FdSc was developed and rolled out at an unfortunate time for the target sectors. The recent economic climate has meant that housing development stalled, a new government (with different approaches and priorities) was elected, regeneration programmes were mothballed, public sector budgets have been reduced meaning that there is less job security and potentially fewer staff in post. This has affected the housing, regeneration and community development sectors more than most within the public sector.

Secondly, there remains a lack of awareness of the FdSc and its relevance for organisations. There does not appear to have been a successful narrative created around what sustainable communities means. The Foundation degree in Sustainable Communities formed part of a package of ASC/HAC activity including a range of toolkits that has since been criticised by Hockey et al (2010). They argue the ASC/HAC approach was a top down approach to vocational learning that did not recognise that a more bottom-up approach was required because learning is "...dependent on an intimate knowledge of concrete social detail in the workplace". Hockey et al. also suggest that some workplaces may have questioned the relevance of the more abstract definitions of competences that were described as part of skills agenda (p.226). For the FdSc this lack of clarity about the key terms exacerbates a lack of understanding about Foundation Degrees generally and specifically what the qualification offers individuals and organisations. Although these issues will arguably require time to resolve the current result is that the FdSc entered into a niche market between more established and 'validated' courses of housing, regeneration, planning and community development.

Thirdly, there was some miss-marketing of the FdSc which has, largely, sought students from the public sector who are already working within housing, regeneration and/or community development. These are areas where there exist reasonably clear pathways for qualifications and professional accreditation set by line and senior managers. The FdSc was, for the most part, not strategically marketed at potential students not yet in these sectors.

The relationship between employers, individuals, providers and government in delivering the skills agenda has had a varied emphasis on the extent to which it is supplier led compared to demand led since 1964. This is discussed in the Leitch Review (2006, p.48) which also put forward the case for more demand led provision around the time the Egan recommendations were being translated into training and education programmes by the ASC and then HCA. At the time of its development the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities appeared to be based on robust evidence of demand (Egan 2004; Homes and Communities Agency, 2008). The evidence in this chapter suggests that possibly the methodology for assessing demand had substantial weaknesses or, if the demand was there, it

was generated by a desire amongst employers to be seen to be supporting a particular political discourse. As such it has proved vulnerable to the change in government.

The findings reported here have highlighted the danger for HEIs associated with closely aligning a course to the political orthodoxy of the time. The name and notion of 'Sustainable Communities' appears to have been an ongoing barrier for the programme as it was perceived as too ambiguous as well as wedded to a New Labour political discourse. This appears to have been a real barrier to achieving greater numbers of students as well as a potential barrier to achieving high level recognition and future funding. Whilst the politics may have moved on, however, the priorities set out within the concept, such as meeting diverse needs, enhancing local environment, strengthening economic prosperity and promoting social cohesion endure as prominent narratives with which urban professionals are encouraged to engage. There is valuable learning here that should be considered if HEIs are looking at opportunities to develop programmes around the latest political discourse/movement.

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